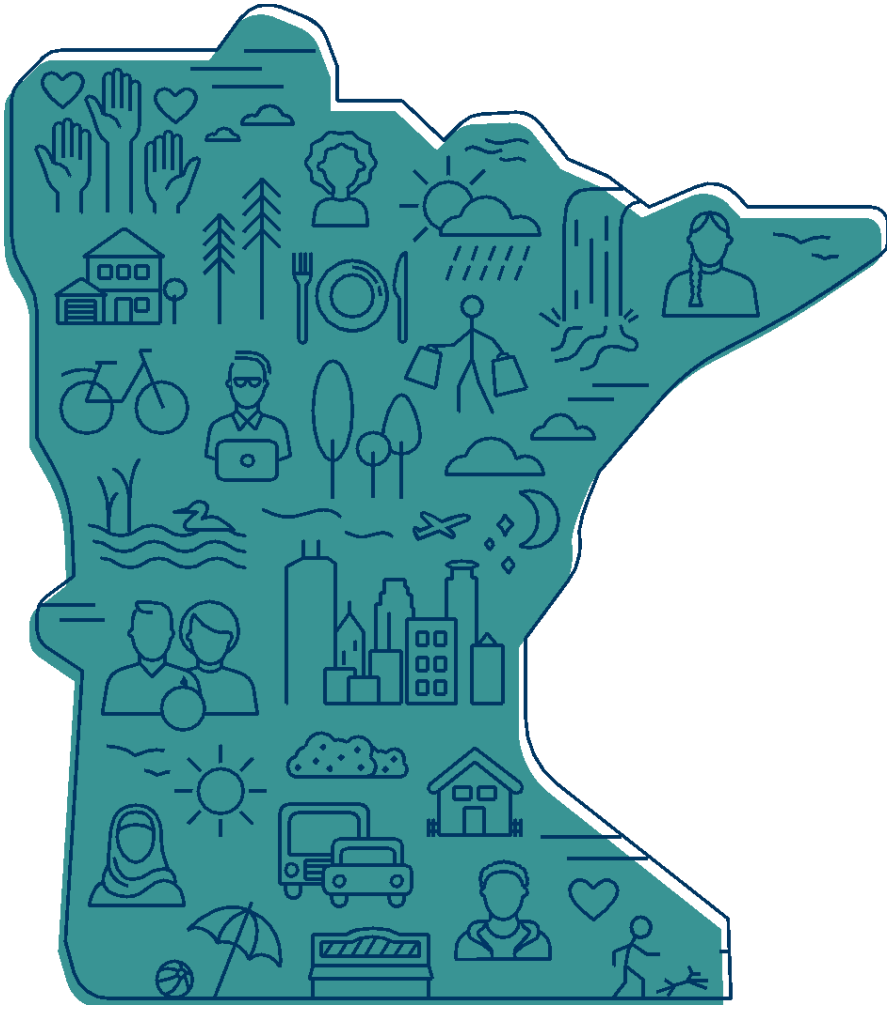
Age-Friendly Minnesota
Statewide Needs Assessment

Community Focus Group
Facilitator Guide



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Age-Friendly Minnesota
Statewide Needs Assessment

Overview

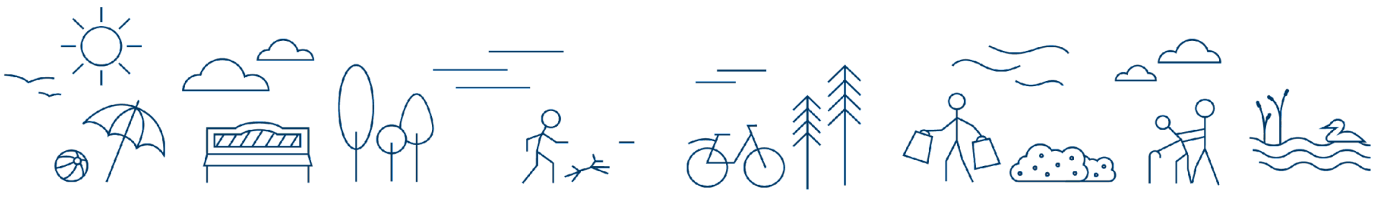
The Age-Friendly MN Statewide Needs Assessment is designed to gather information about what older Minnesotans—present and future—want and need in their communities in order to be healthy, engaged, and safe in later life.

Focus groups or listening sessions are one method being used to gather input from people about their concerns and priorities for Age-Friendly MN. This Facilitator Guide, which accompanies focus group presentation slides, is designed to provide the information needed to coordinate and lead a focus group for Age-Friendly Minnesota. The Guide lays out instructions for how to prepare for, conduct, and submit notes from your focus group.

Due to ongoing concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, **focus groups will be conducted online**; this guide provides instructions for setting up and conducting focus groups on virtual platforms.

Focus Group Basics

- **Number of participants**: A good number of people for a focus group is 5-8 people.
- **Facilitators**: Focus groups should have two facilitators--a discussion leader and a notetaker.
- **Length**: A recommended length for a focus group is 45-90 minutes. These focus groups are structured for 60-minute sessions; however, you may adjust your session length if you choose. Length will depend on the number of people in the focus group, the facilitator, and dynamics of any given group.



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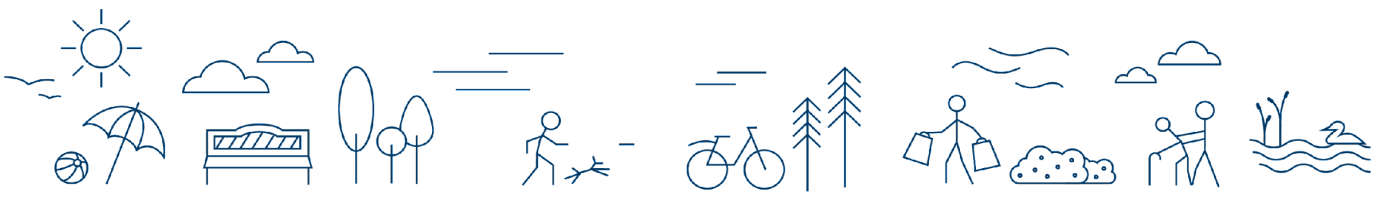
PREPARE FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

1. Coordinate Your Focus Group

- **Identify two facilitators.**
    - Facilitator 1 leads discussion and interacts with participants.
    - Facilitator 2 takes notes to ensure all input shared by participants is recorded.
    - Each facilitator should have their own computer for the session.
- **Set a date and time.** Depending on your circumstances, you may decide to set the date and time yourself, or work with your participants to find a date that works for the group.
- **Recruit participants**. In most cases you will need to identify your own focus group participants. Aim for 5-8 people.
    - It may be helpful if participants are relatively similar in terms of age/life stage. It may aid data analysis if participants also come from a similar geographic area, but this is not essential.
    - Participants can be community members or providers. If they are providers, ask them to participate from their perspective as individuals rather than as professionals, and to think about their lives now as well as in the future.
    - **Sample invitation language** that can be used to recruit participants via social media or elsewhere:
        - Please join us for an Age-Friendly Minnesota Listening Session, hosted by [*organization name*]. Add your voice to planning efforts for your community and the State of Minnesota. To sign up or for more information, call [*phone number*] or email [*email address*].

2. Register Your Event and Get Ready

- Once you have identified participants and set a date, register your event by sending an email to MN.DHS.AgeFriendlyMN@state.mn.us that includes the following information:
    - Names of two co-facilitators
    - Date and time of your focus group
    - Name of the group (This is for internal reference only. It could include a community or organization name, or something about the participants.)
- Upon registering your event, you will receive a reporting template for note taking.
- Send invitations to participants.
- Prior to the event, facilitators should test the virtual platform they will be using (e.g., Teams or Zoom) to ensure they are familiar with it--including how to share your screen.
- Read through the Facilitator Guide to familiarize yourself with the questions and process.



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CONDUCT THE FOCUS GROUP

Start the Focus Group

- Log in to your focus group 5-10 minutes ahead of the scheduled start time.
- The facilitator who will be sharing the slides (it can be either one) should pull up the title slide so that participants see it when they join the session. Ensure that facilitators' cameras are on.

SLIDE 1/Title Slide

- When all participants have arrived, facilitators should introduce themselves. (Stop sharing slides during this portion so that everyone can see the facilitators). Explain that one will be leading discussion and the other will be taking notes.
- Share the following information:
    - *We are holding this Listening Session as part of Age-Friendly Minnesota. Listening sessions are being held throughout Minnesota to help the State better understand what Minnesotans want and need as we all grow older. Your voices and experiences will help the State set its priorities and develop plans to make communities across the state better places for older people.*
    - *Everything you share today will remain anonymous; your name is not being tracked and will not be connected to anything you say.*
    - *Thank you in advance for giving your time and input to this effort.*
    - *We will do our best to begin and end on time.*

SLIDE 2/Agenda

- Simply walk through the agenda for the session so that everyone knows what to expect.
- The agenda is timed for 60 minutes. (You may adjust the length of your session if desired.)

SLIDE 3/Introductions

Share the following information with participants:

- *Now we will go around and introduce ourselves. Please share your name (first name is fine), city/town and ZIP code, and your age range.*
- *We will be documenting ZIP code and age range for the purposes of data analysis. We want to understand needs in different places and regions, and what people of different ages are experiencing.*
- *All of the information captured through this listening session will remain anonymous. Names are not being tracked, and will never be attached to anything that is shared.*

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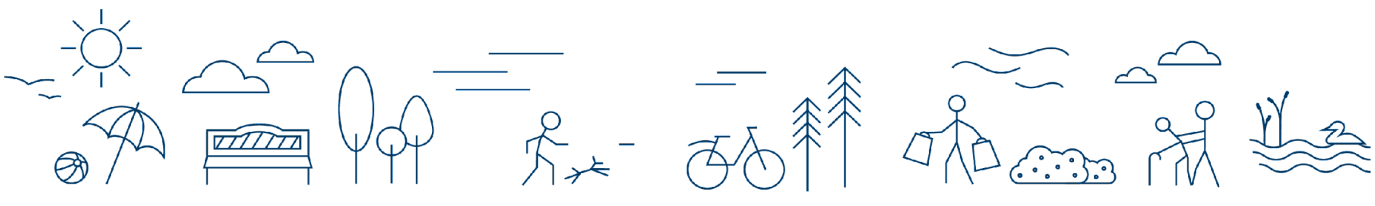
Facilitator 2: Document ZIP code and age range of each participant



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SLIDE 4/Ground Rules and Housekeeping

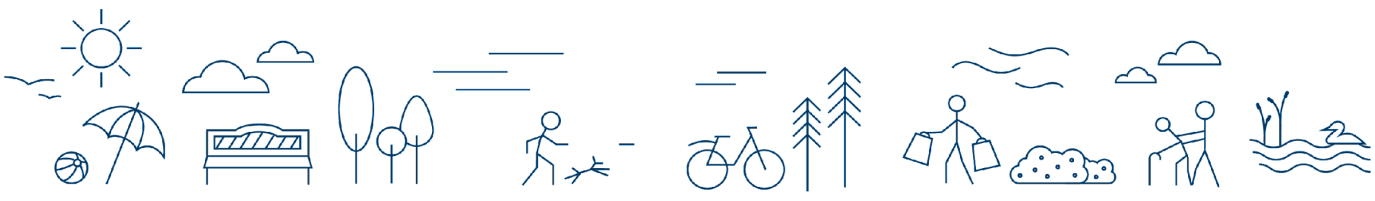
Share the following information:

- *Now we will go over a few ground rules and housekeeping items.*
- *First, the ground rules: We hope to have a lively discussion, and you may agree or disagree with other opinions being shared. So we ask everyone to be respectful of others. We will also avoid talking over each other, even though that can be a little tricky on the virtual platform.*
- *Are there any other ground rules we want to establish?*
- *Next, some housekeeping related to how to use this virtual platform.*
    - [For whichever platform you are using, point out where to click to mute/unmute and turn the camera on/off. Encourage people to leave their cameras turned on if possible. Point out the chat feature and ask people to open it.]
- *We are going to try a test run using the chat feature, so when you have the chat open, type in your answer to this question: [*pick an ice breaker question below or create your own]
    - Do raisins belong in cookies?
    - What is your favorite dessert?
    - If you were a vegetable, which vegetable would you be?
    - [Come up with your own--keep it light and simple.]
- *As we head into the discussion part of the session, you can use the chat feature to share your thoughts if you would like.*

SLIDE 5/Vote for two topics to discuss

NOTE: Providers or organizations leading a focus group may opt to choose discussion topics ahead of time rather than having participants vote. In that case, skip the step outlined in this slide and jump straight into the facilitated discussion.

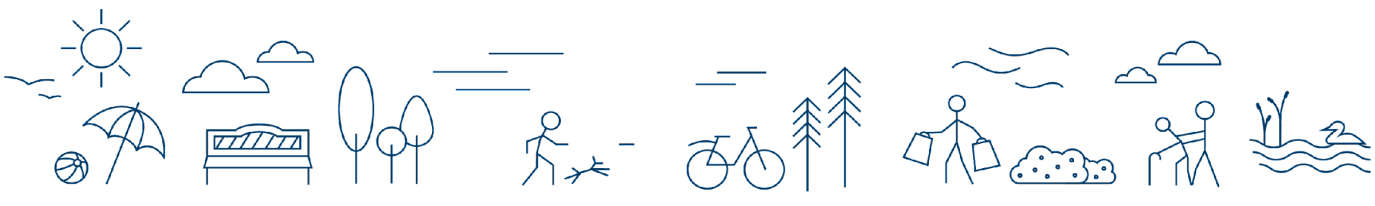
- Explain that participants now will choose, by vote, which <u>two</u> of the below eight domains they would like to discuss. (If time allows, the group may cover an additional topic of choice.)
- Note that there are intersections between the domains. Discussion related to transportation can occur in the Community Supports and Health Services and vice versa, for example.
- Read each domain name as on the slide, followed by the brief descriptions below, so that participants understand each topic.



1. **Built Environment: Housing, Outdoor Spaces, and Buildings**: This topic includes questions related to housing and to the physical environment in your community, both outdoor spaces as well as buildings.
2. **Transportation:** This topic addresses issues related to how you travel around your community, both now and in the future.
3. **Community Support and Health Services**: This topic includes questions about services and resources available around your community, services and resources that can come into your home, and healthcare.
4. **Communication and Information:** These questions cover how you find information about things you want and need in your community--the availability and ease of finding and using community information and resources.
5. **Social Participation and Inclusion:** This topic includes experiences related to social connection with family, friends, and others in the community.
6. **Work, Volunteering, and Civic Engagement:** This section asks about experiences with employment and volunteering.
7. **Safety, Basic Needs, and Affording Aging:** This section asks about whether we will have what we need as we grow older, and how safe we feel in our communities.
8. **Emergency Preparedness and Community Satisfaction:** This section asks about how we and our communities can be better prepared for emergencies.

Notes:

- Each of the next eight slides (slides 6-13) covers one domain/discussion topic. Each focus group will discuss only two of the eight topics.
- Facilitator 1 asks questions and leads discussion, and Facilitator 2 takes notes and tracks time.
- Spend about 20 minutes discussing each of the two chosen domains. If things wrap up early, feel free to discuss another domain, or simply end the session early.
- Asking the questions:
  - *Prompts*: Many questions are followed by prompts, which can be read immediately after the main question is asked in order to further explain the question and help stimulate discussion.
  - *Follow-up questions*: In some cases, follow-up questions are also provided. These are largely optional. Use them as it seems appropriate and as time permits. You may also ask your own follow-up questions generated by participants' comments.
  - Where not explicitly stated in a question, encourage participants to consider the questions from a current and future perspective.
- If possible, Facilitator 2 should attempt to capture some direct quotes that might be meaningful to share when presenting findings.



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SLIDE 6/Domain 1: Built Environment: Housing, Outdoor Spaces, and Buildings

Question 1: Thinking about where you live, what characteristics of the physical environment (such housing choices, green spaces, sidewalks, community buildings) do you like?

Question 2: What is missing or needs improvement within your immediate community?

- Follow-up questions:
  - Are there enough housing choices and options for people at different stages of life and income levels?
  - Are buildings easy to use and get in and out of? Think about things like automatic doors and convenient parking, public restrooms?
  - Are you able to spend time outdoors in parks or other places if you would like?

- (Time permitting) Is there anything else you'd like to share related to this discussion topic?

SLIDE 7/Domain 2: Transportation

Question: What transportation options do you wish you had or expect to need, now or in the future?

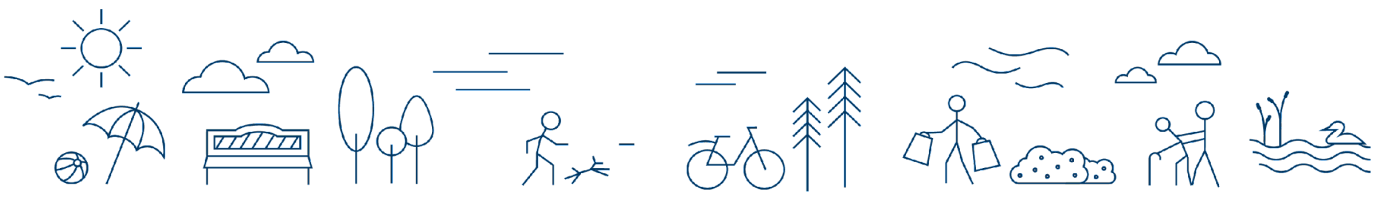
Follow-up questions:

- If you don't drive, or if you think about the possibility of not driving at some point in the future, how would you get around?
- Talk about some transportation options in your community. Which do you use, or would you use? What is missing?
- We know most people drive and prefer to drive when they can. What can we do to make driving safer for older drivers?
- (Time permitting) Is there anything else you'd like to share related to Transportation?

SLIDE 8/Domain 3: Community Support and Health Services

Question: How available are the services and resources you need in your community?

- **In the <u>community</u> (such as groceries, pharmacies, health and wellness classes, legal services, etc.)**
- **In the <u>home</u> (such as help with housework/ yardwork, meal delivery, home care, respite, etc.)**
- **<u>Healthcare</u> (such as clinics, hospitals, doctors, mental health services)**



After reading the question, explain the following:

- *We are going to look at this question in three different parts, even though there is some overlap between them. First, thinking about services and resources out in the community; second, thinking about services that could come into your home; and third, we'll look at healthcare specifically because it's a big topic.*

- *Let's start with services in the community. How available are services in the community, such as grocery stores, pharmacies, health and wellness classes, legal services, and so on.*
    - **Follow up question**: Are there services you have trouble getting now, or might have trouble getting in the future?

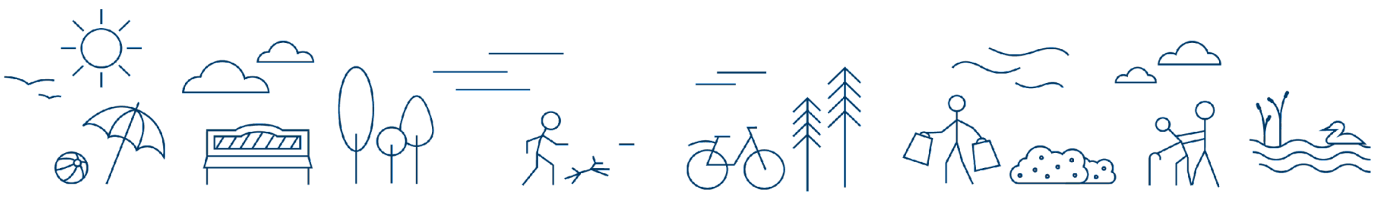
- Let's move to the second bullet: How available are services and resources in your home?
    - **Follow-up question**: Again, are there services you have trouble getting now, or might have trouble getting in the future? What are the barriers?

- Finally, let's talk about healthcare. How available are healthcare services and resources to you in your community? Think about clinics and hospitals, doctors, mental health providers. (Prompts: Are they available and accessible to you? Can you get to them?)
    - Follow-up question: Are healthcare providers respectful? Do they understand your language and culture?

SLIDE 9/Domain 4: Communication and Information

Question: Where do you turn, or where would you turn in the future, for information about services or resources related to aging (such as help with yardwork, rides to appointments, understanding Medicare, social opportunities, etc.)? (Prompts: For example, you might turn to family and friends, your doctor, your faith community, the internet, a community center, county social services, the barber shop, etc.)

- Follow-up questions:
    - Do you find it difficult to get the information you need--for example, due to the system being complicated, language or culture, not knowing who to call, or any other reasons?
    - To what extent do you use the internet? Why or why not?
        - If you do use it, what kind of device do you use (for example, a phone, tablet, or computer).
        - If you do not use it, why not--for example, due to cost, lack of broadband access, not sure how to use it? Would you like to use the internet if



possible?
    - Do you have broadband access--meaning reliable high-speed internet connection--at home or somewhere nearby?
    - Where would you like to be able to get information?
    - (Time permitting) Is there anything else you'd like to share related to Communication and Information?

SLIDE 10/Domain 5: Social Participation & Inclusion

Question: What are the most important activities or places in your community for you in terms of connecting with family, friends, neighbors and others? *(Prompts: Activities might include going to church, being part of a civic organization or club, volunteering, taking a class, doing something social online, etc. Examples of places that you connect with people might be a community center, a coffee shop or restaurant, the homes of family or friends, etc.)*

- Follow-up questions:
    - Do you use the internet to connect with family, friends, or others? Phone?
    - What opportunities or activities do you wish existed?
        i. (Prompt, if needed): Are there things that exist in other communities that you would like to have?
        ii. Follow up question: In terms of socializing and connecting with other people, do you feel included in that way in your community?

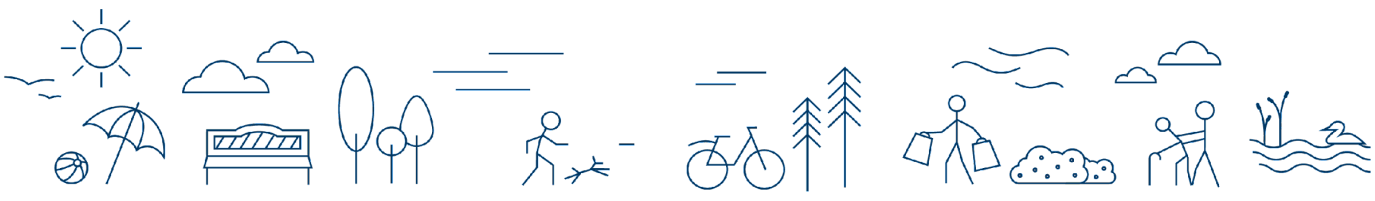
    - (Time permitting) Is there anything else you'd like to share related to Social Participation & Inclusion?

SLIDE 11/Domain 6: Work, Volunteering, and Civic Engagement

Question 1: Would you change anything related to your employment? If so, what? *(Prompts: Think about how long you worked or how long you plan to work.)*

- Follow-up question:
    - If you're not working now, would you like to be working--for income, for enjoyment, both? What would be important to you (for example, a flexible schedule, mentorship role)?

Question 2: Are you, or have you been, employed while also helping to care for a family member or friend?



Question 3: How can communities leverage the talent and experience of older adults?

- Follow-up question:
    - What is your experience with volunteering in your community? *(Prompts: Does your community offer volunteer opportunities of interest to you? And how easy is it to find information about volunteering?*
    - (Time permitting) Is there anything else you'd like to share related to Work & Volunteering?

SLIDE 12/Domain 7: Safety, Basic Needs, and Affording Aging

Question 1: To what extent do you feel you will have (and be able to afford) the things you need as you get older? (Prompts: Think about things like affordable and appropriate housing, healthy food, transportation, health care, support system. Will you be available to afford these things and to otherwise have access to them?)

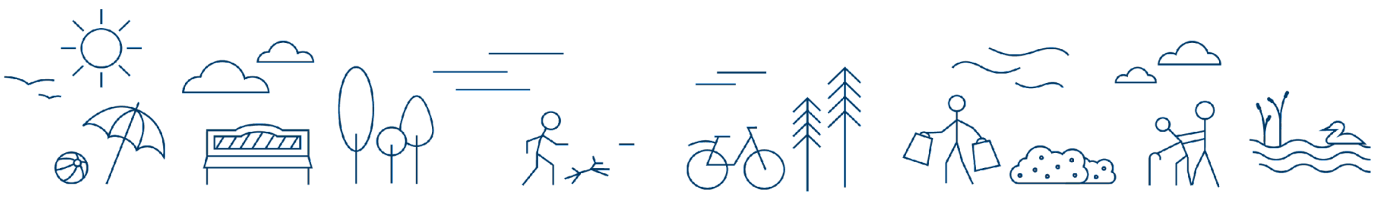
- **Follow-up question: If you have challenges with these things now, or think you might in the future, what are they?** (Prompts: Think about things like whether the system is hard to use, language, culture, you're not sure who to call, you may not be able to afford everything you need, lack of internet access, etc.)

Question 2: Do you feel safe in your community? *(*Prompts: Feeling safe could refer to personal safety--which could mean things like feeling safe around others while at home or out in the community, or safety related to things like scams or frauds--or it could refer to safe physical environments--like sidewalks that are in good condition, streets are safe to cross, etc.

- You can define "community" here whichever ways make sense for you. More than one answer is fine.

Question 3: Do you feel welcome in your community? (Prompts: Welcome would mean that you feel respected in relation to your age, your culture, or any other characteristics. Or, for example, being able to get information in your language.)

- Again, you can define "community" here whichever ways you choose. More than one answer is fine.



SLIDE 13/Domain 8: Emergency Preparedness

Question 1: What situations would you identify as a personal emergency and do you have a plan?
Prompts:

a. Assess what constitutes a personal emergency (in test sessions they ranged from medical situations to cows leaving the barn).
b. How do members prepare for, having a plan for things like food and water, prescription medications, caring for vulnerable loved one, etc.

Question 2: How resilient is your community to emergencies?
Prompts:

1. **At its simplest, community resilience is the ability of a community to withstand and recover from a disaster.**
2. Emergencies could be weather-related, such as flooding or a tornado--it could be another public health crisis, like COVID-19, or something else.
3. What is the biggest concern for a community wide about an emergency or disaster?
4. What do you think is your role if there is an emergency in your community?

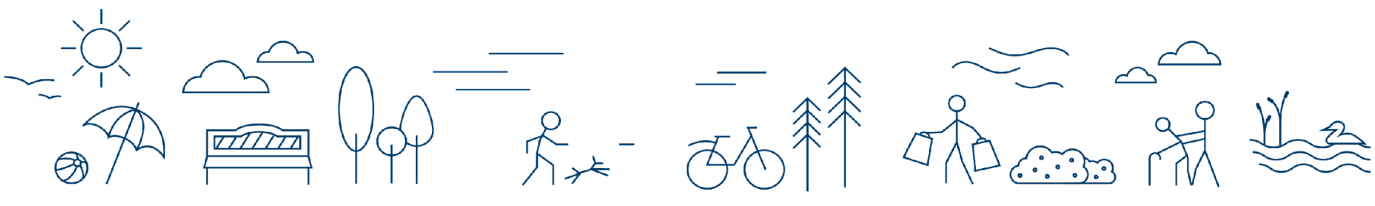
Follow-up question:

- (Time permitting) How would you rate your state as a place for people to live as they age? Can you tell me more about that? What makes you rate it this way?

SLIDE 14/Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Facilitator 1 closes the session:

- That brings us to the end of our session.
- Thank you again so much for participating in this listening session. We greatly appreciate your time and input.
- As a next step, we encourage you to take the Age-Friendly MN survey, which takes about 20 minutes and asks questions on all 8 domains that were noted at the start of this presentation.
- And if you have other comments, feedback, or questions, feel free to send them the Age-Friendly MN email address and someone will get back to you.
- We will place the survey link and the email address in the chat for you if interested.
    - Survey link: https://mn.gov/dhs/age-friendly-mn/
    - Email address: MN.DHS.AgeFriendlyMN@state.mn.us



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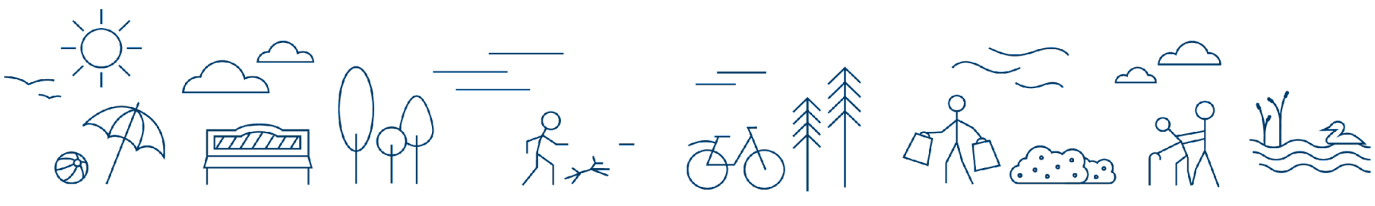
AFTER YOUR FOCUS GROUP: FINAL STEPS

- Save the reporting template containing your notes, and email it to MN.DHS.AgeFriendlyMN@state.mn.us within 3 days following the focus group.
- Send a thank-you message to your focus group participants.